



SOMERVILLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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Introduction

"A Community Development Plan (CDP) follows a specific framework outlined by the state, setting locally-defined priorities for the location, type, and quantity of new housing units, open space to be protected, commercial and industrial economic development, and improvements to transportation. This process began in 2002 through Massachusetts Executive Order 418."



The CDP provides a vehicle to step back, take a comprehensive view of the City's current planning activities and programs, and analyze where the gaps are in policies and programs, in order to realize the objectives and goals stated during visioning exercises.

The CDP outlines and develops priorities to implement citywide and neighborhood-by-neighborhood development goals for all elements of the plan. Ultimately, all City departments can use this plan as a framework to guide planning efforts and implementation activities.

In the past several years, Somerville citizens have participated in numerous community planning processes at various levels of detail. The Consolidated 5-year Plan required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), is a comprehensive assessment of the Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD) goals and objectives. The plan addresses how best to achieve these goals and prioritize them. OHCD and other City departments have also completed many district specific planning studies that have established visions and implementation plans for areas such as Assembly Square, East Somerville, Union Square, and North Point-Somerville.

During the months of May and June 2002, OHCD hosted four neighborhood visioning meetings and one final 'Community Fair', in preparation for the CDP. The five community meetings helped to guide the City in the devel-

opment of a draft Vision Statement that has been used to direct the City through the development of the CDP.

Purpose

In Spring 2003, the City of Somerville received a \$30,000 grant pursuant to Executive Order 418. Executive Order 418 allowed communities to address future growth and development by creating visions, goals, and strategies in four topic areas: natural resources and open space, housing, economic development, and transportation. The purpose of EO418 is to encourage communities to think about these topics comprehensively as opposed to each in its own box. These four issues are interrelated – for example, what the City does to resolve housing issues affects transportation; decisions on economic growth will impact housing and transportation needs. All affect open space and natural resources.

The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Department of Housing and Community Development, Executive Office of Transportation and Construction, and the Department of Economic Development all provided funding for this Plan. The City, in conjunction with its consultants, McGregor & Associates, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), and GLC Development Resources and also volunteered assistance from Somerville Community Corporation (SCC), drafted the four elements of the Plan.

This plan is targeted towards three different audiences. First, it is directed towards the public so that citizens and businesses in Somerville have a good understanding of land use and development issues in the City. Second, this plan is useful for City departments because it directs actions taken and policies advocated in the conduct of running the City. Third, this plan informs the State as to what actions the City will pursue to comprehensively address the planning concerns addressed in Executive Order 418.



Vision Statement

Unlike many of the cities and towns in Massachusetts, Somerville is a community that has already “developed” to a significant degree over the past 150 years. Nearly all of the physical area of the City has been built upon already—for housing, stores, industries, offices, warehouse, schools, churches, and other public and private uses. What land remains has been in large part preserved for active recreational use. In addition, over this history, most of the City has experienced multiple waves of development and redevelopment, as buildings, land uses, and the cultural and economic fabrics of the City have changed and developed over time, creating a rich and diverse mix of residents, businesses, and neighborhoods.

For these reasons, it is safe to say that no “undeveloped land” remains in Somerville to serve as the basis for a standard community-wide vision statement. Somerville’s future must build upon Somerville’s past and present. In this context, Community Development will often mean *redevelopment*, both small scale (e.g., commercial street-front improvement programs, tree planting, housing rehabilitation) and large (e.g. City-wide brownfields initiatives, Assembly Square redevelopment, new transit system improvements). Given this, we propose a vision that acknowledges those aspects of our community—including cultural, economic, and natural elements—that we desire to preserve, and those that we wish to develop further or along different lines.

When viewed comprehensively, the overall vision of this community development plan is a vision of a strong, diverse, and vibrant community: a healthy mix of people, businesses, and organizations supported by and in turn helping to support high quality neighborhoods, transportation, municipal services, civic institutions, and open spaces. Somerville’s future presents an opportunity to develop in a way that blends the best of both worlds of City and Suburb.

We can distill this vision into the component

parts of Housing, Economic Development, Open Space, and Transportation. Based on the input we received in the various neighborhood forums, we propose the following visions for these areas, noting aspects to preserve as well as areas to enhance or improve on existing conditions. We have also indicated potential connections between these elements, as noted by various participants in the process, whether they are positive (mutually-reinforcing connections) or negative (necessary tradeoffs between goals).

HOUSING

- *Preserve housing suitable for different family sizes, styles, and income levels, with an emphasis on maintaining the City’s historically affordable rents and respecting the architectural heritage of our “city of homes.”*
- *Ensure more permanently protected affordable housing*
- *Maintain condition and appearance of existing housing stock, especially historically significant elements*
- *Prevent tendency to overcrowd and overdevelop land and housing*
- *Stress the importance of residential open space in housing: yards, gardens, porches provide much needed natural relief (connects to Open Space Element)*
- *Ensure that workers in the City can afford to live in the City (connects to Economic Development Element)*
- *Consider public transit options when locating new housing (connects to Transportation Element)*
- *Develop mixed use areas to house both residents and the businesses that serve them (connects to Economic Development Element)*



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- *Preserve diverse mix of local shops and restaurants with larger regional commercial and employment attractors*
- *Increase the City's commercial tax base*
- *Improve the aesthetics of existing squares and commercial main streets*
- *Be mindful of potential conflicts between commercial or industrial uses and residential neighborhoods (connects with Housing Element)*
- *Require development of public open space as component of large commercial projects (connects to Open Space Element)*
- *Provide adequate transportation and parking for new and existing commercial areas (connects to Transportation Element)*

OPEN SPACE

- *Preserve variety of neighborhood parks and playgrounds within walking distance of nearly all residents*
- *Preserve trees and remaining natural areas*
- *Improve connections between open spaces, especially along the Community Path and along the Mystic River*
- *Prevent additional paving or development of public and private green space*
- *Acquire additional open space properties when unique opportunities arise*
- *Ensure adequate open space opportunities for new and existing housing, whether public or private (connects to Housing Element)*
- *Enhance connections between open spaces and commercial centers, especially in Davis Square (Community Path) and Assembly Square (Mystic River waterfront) (connects to Economic Development Element)*
- *Develop Community Path and river waterfront as open space as well as alternate transportation route (connects to Transportation Element)*

TRANSPORTATION

- *Preserve the ease of access to and from Boston and the northern suburbs, and within and around the City*
- *Expand public transit service, including new MBTA stops in Union Square and Assembly Square*
- *Improve mass transit and other alternatives within the City (buses, Community Path)*
- *Provide more parking, especially in commercial centers*
- *Minimize congestion and noise caused by "cut through" traffic*
- *Develop more "pedestrian friendly" commercial areas and neighborhoods (connects to all other Elements)*

Note potential connections and tradeoffs between parking, traffic, transit, economic development, and quality of life in and around commercial neighborhoods (connects to Housing and Economic Development Elements)

After the initial visioning sessions and approval of the CDP scope of services by the Inter-Agency Working Group, the City hosted element specific meetings in June of 2003. These meetings helped the City and its consultants receive public feedback and comment for each specific element and lead to final plan development.

Layout of Plan

Somerville's Community Development Plan was carefully structured to implement an overall vision in each of the identified elements. The City felt that it was important to fully address Somerville's Development History, Economic Development, Transportation, Housing and Open Space and to also create a section that in a sense weaves each of these elements together where they overlap.

The document was written and constructed in a manner that the Commonwealth of



Massachusetts, City of Somerville and the public/development community would find easy to understand and user friendly.

It was the goal of the City to create a plan that would encourage its own implementation due to its clear and concise recommendations based on the most up to date data collection and information and recently identified community wants and needs.

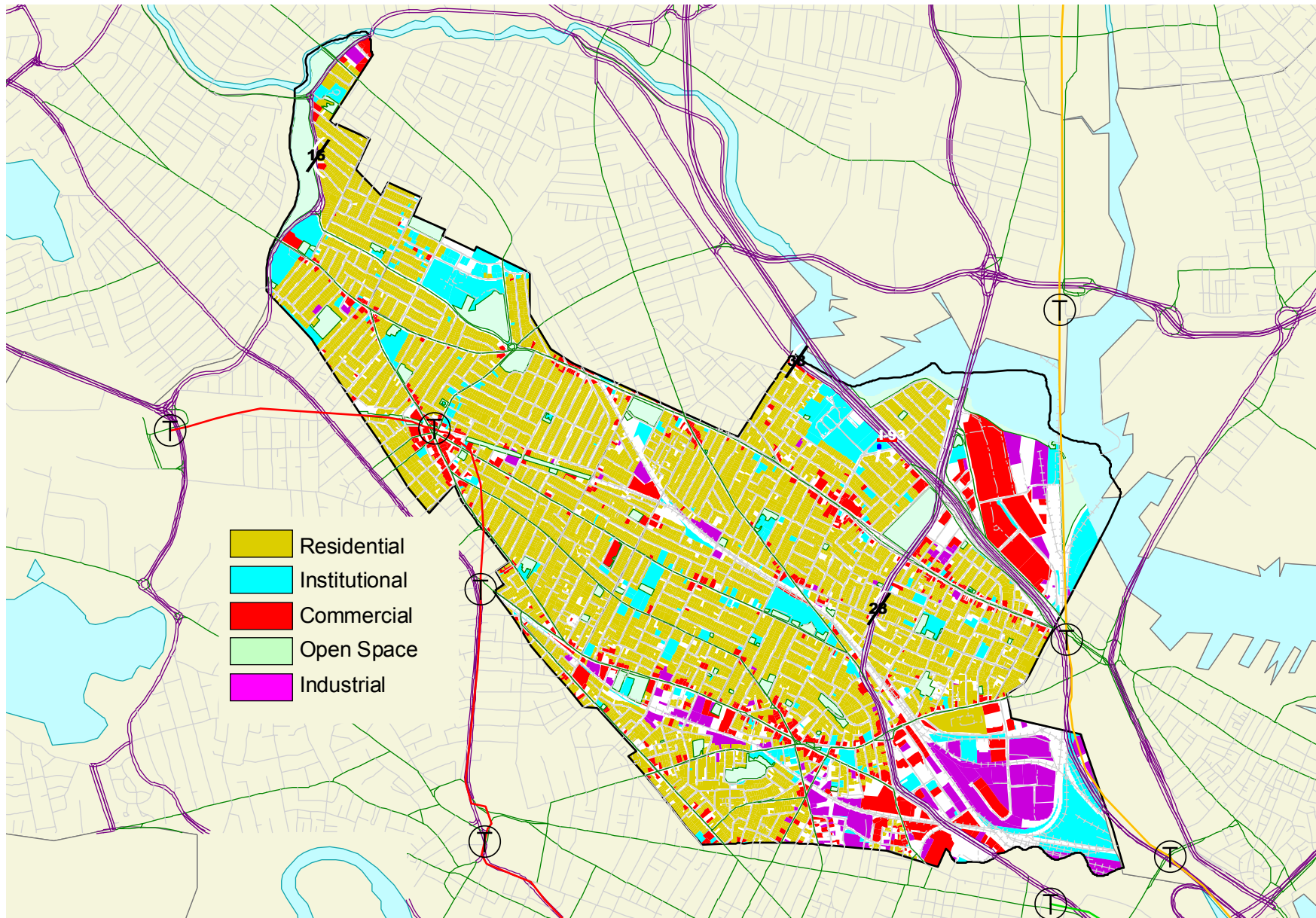
Each section is summarized and written as its own element, and also is prefaced with an Executive Summary. The Executive Summaries were written so that the entire Community Development Plan would not have to be pored through should someone wish to have only an overview. This makes it easy for the City to further present the plan to residents and developers in a manner that is not intimidating, but friendly.

At the end of each element is a list of specific recommendations and implementation measures to be taken. The recommended implementation program is also presented in summary form, but additional detail can be found in the full text of each plan element.

The Community Development Plan also includes a number of action plan maps that highlight the strategies to be used and the locations targeted for the open space, economic development, housing and transportation recommendations.



Existing Land-Use by Parcel





Existing Zoning

